EMOTIONS IN PERSONAL CONSTRUCT THEORY: A REVIEW

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George Kelly claimed that there were no emotions in Personal Construct Theory (PCT). The present paper notes that Kelly did define four important emotions and reviews the work by McCoy in extending the range of emotions that can be explained by PCT. In addition, the theories of personality formulated by non-PCT psychologists (Paul McReynolds and Prescott Lecky), which are consistent with PCT and which are provocative, are discussed.

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We have to be careful in reporting George Kelly's theory. It is not that George Kelly liked to mislead people, but he liked to test people, to play games, perhaps to see whether they were sharp enough to see the light. Part of this game playing is apparent in the way in which he described his own theory. He noted very early in his exposition of the theory of personal constructs that his theory had no place for emotions. He said, "There is no *ego*, no *emotion*, no *motivation*, no *reinforcement*, no *drive*, no *unconscious*, no *need*" (Kelly, 1955, p. x). Many readers of his theory accept this, and I can imagine Kelly's eyes twinkling as he says to himself, "Fooled you."

One task for any scholar who proposes a new theory is to show how this new theory is unlike any other that has been proposed before - to sharpen the differences rather than look for similarities. In his description of his theory above, Kelly is saying that his theory is not like Freud's psychoanalytic theory and not like Skinner's theory of learning. But he is also misleading us.

Personal Construct Theory (PCT) is certainly quite different from Skinner's learning theory and Freud's psychoanalytic theory. There is no reinforcement, ego or unconscious, as defined in those theories, in PCT. But the theory is viewed by almost all textbooks on theories of personality as a cognitive theory. Since modern psychology views motivation as involving the choice of behavior made by an individual, Kelly's Choice corollary is clearly a motivational element. And since construct systems change on the basis of people's past experience, learning of a kind takes place.

According to McCoy (1977, p. 99), "Kelly's expressed wish [was] to abandon emotion as a separate category of human behaviour..." Bannister (2003) phrased this issue in terms of a bipolar construct, *thought versus emotion*, and admitted that Kelly chose to leave this construct out of PCT. Bannister noted that reviewers of PCT typically viewed PCT as a cognitive theory of personality and criticized PCT for not dealing with emotions, but Bannister defended Kelly by arguing that there, "can be no onus on any theory to duplicate the constructs of another" (p. 65).

Kelly said that his theory had no emotion but, on the other hand, he provided definitions of threat, fear, anxiety, and guilt. Therefore, Kelly did have a small place in his theory for emotions. Later PCT writers have rejected Kelly's position. Miall (1989), for example, asserted that, "emotion therefore has a significant role in organizing the construct system" (p. 185), but he admitted that PCT, "has not so far provided a matrix for refocusing the issues in such a way that these long-standing conflicts about the role of emotions could be resolved" (p. 187).

In this essay, Kelly's own definitions of these emotions will be presented. Next, McCoy's elaboration of emotions based on Kelly's blueprint will be described. Finally a theorist whose views have long been relegated to the footnotes of personality theory, Prescott Lecky, will be described, with a focus on his description of emotions, descriptions which fit neatly into PCT.

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THE POSITION OF EMOTIONS IN THE PSYCHE

Emotions have long been a "problem" for psychologists. Are they central to human experience or are they, as it were, the "exhaust" of human experience, an unavoidable nuisance? This debate has also concerned PC theorists and constructivists. As Miall (1989) noted, McCoy (1977), whose ideas will be discussed later, explored how emotions can be described in terms of the core and non-core structures of a personal construct system, while Katz (1984) saw emotions as indicating the activation of primitive constructs[1]. Cummins (2003), in discussing anger in PCT quickly moves to a discussion of *anger constructs*, thereby changing the focus from emotions to cognitions.

In contrast, Mascolo and Mancuso (1990) rejected the duality of human experience as consisting of emotions and cognitions and advocated a unified adaptive system. Indeed, they quote Mandler (1984) approvingly who denied the psychological relevance of emotions. Mascolo and Mancuso conceptualised emotional states as "the intrapsychological context in which there appears mobilization (or demobilization) activity that accompanies and supports transitions in the relation between perceived events and a person's goals or concerns" (p. 209). Positive emotions accompany resolution of input-concern discrepancies and negative emotions accompany mismatches between input and concerns. Emotional experiences are, therefore, the result of conscious construction.

Mascolo and Mancuso (1990) did define the following emotions. The first five are experienced when maintenance of some state is threatened.

- Anger: the concern is to maintain conditions which ought to exist.
- Sadness: the concern is to maintain contact with a valued object.
- Fear: the concern is to maintain the integrity of the self.
- Guilt: the concern is to maintain internal moral standards.
- Shame: the concern is to maintain another's validation of one's identity.

The final two are experienced when goals are achieved.

- Joy: when any salient goal is attained.
- Pride: when a goal is attained that enhances one's identity.[2]

However, Mascolo and Mancuso "spurn the task of building a theory of the different emotions" (p. 219). Furthermore, emotions do not cause behavior but rather they are the result of a breakdown in construing with accompanying bodily changes (see Miall, 1989, p. 186). Miall viewed their approach as similar to that of William James (1884) and, later, of Schachter (1971) in which emotions were merely the subjective interpretation of a state of arousal (with physiological and cognitive components).

Miall (1989) defined emotions as signalling "an active self-related concern: an emotion is the constructive anticipation of evolution or change in the construct system relating to the self" (p. 190). "Emotion in the construct system in thus self-referential and anticipatory" (p. 191). Kirsch and Jordan (2000) stated that, "emotions are contained implicitly as a result of a previous construction and its verification (e.g. validation/invalidation)" (p. 291). This approach was pursued by McCoy (1977; see later).

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[1] Katz's proposal of "phylogenetically rooted *primitive constructs* which emerge during characteristic periods in the individual's ontogenetic development" (p. 318) does not seem to have received wide acceptance.

[2] In a subsequent article, Mascolo and Mancuso (1992) defined pride, guilt and shame in terms of appraisal and felt motive-action tendency components.

KELLY AND EMOTION[3]

Threat

Threat was defined by Kelly as an awareness that a comprehensive change was imminent in your core constructs and, therefore, in your conception of yourself. In the broadest sense, threat can be induced when we perceive any plausible alternative to our core constructs. A comprehensive change in one's core constructs is what occurs during an "identity crisis," when one's conception of oneself is shaken and needs to be reconstrued. The assistance of a long-term psychotherapist is helpful in this process.

In contrast, fear, defined as an awareness that an incidental change is imminent in your core constructs, is much less interesting. Since the change in one's core constructs is small, people typically handle fear without recourse to psychotherapy.

Guilt

Guilt is defined as an experience that accompanies your perception that you have become dislodged from your core role. Your core role is the subsystem of constructs that enables you to predict and describe your behavior. It gives you a sense of identity. Guilt is the result of invalidating your core constructs, that is, finding out that you are not the kind of person whom you thought you were. The discrepancy between what you thought you were and what you now realise you are has to be relevant to your core role for the guilt to be strong and psychologically important.

This definition of guilt is similar to that provided by Freud's psychoanalytic theory. For Freud, guilt is experienced when some of your desires come into conflict with your superego desires, desires that include the dos and don'ts (the ego ideal and conscience, respectively), most of which were introjected from your parents. For Kelly, guilt is experienced when your behaviors are not consistent with your theory of

yourself. Although Kelly does not take a position on the sources of the core role, in particular, the degree to which it is formed by the expectations of the parents for their children, it is quite likely that many aspects of the core role are based on parental expectations for their children.

Anxiety

Anxiety is experienced when your construction system no longer applies to the situation that confronts you. You cannot construe (make sense of) what is happening. Finding yourself in any new situation leads to some anxiety. If you have developed a sound construction system, you will eventually make sense of the situation and make effective choices as to how to respond. If you do this, your construction grows in its range of applicability.

However, if your construction system suggests no appropriate behavior for you, then your anxiety may become extreme and chronic and you may choose an unhealthy strategy. For example, you may withdraw into a more predictable world (constriction), or you may loosen your construction system so that it provides some guidance, even though the decisions you make may be ineffective.

Independently of PCT, McReynolds (1956, 1960) suggested that anxiety is aroused in four situations.
(1) the rate of influx of information is too high,[4]
(2) the information is too novel to assimilate,
(3) the additional constructs needed to assimilate the information is not presently available, and
(4) the information is internally inconsistent.[5]

The first three sources may disappear with time, but the fourth source may generate long-term anxiety.

McReynolds noted several hypotheses that could be derived from these ideas. First, the

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[3] For a modern presentation of Kelly's definitions, see Bannister (2003) and Butt (2008).

[4] McReynolds used the term "percepts" rather than "information."

[5] This is found in double-bind communications where the different levels of communication (verbal and non-verbal) may conflict.

greater a person's anxiety, the stronger will be his/her tendency to assimilate new percepts that cannot be avoided (c.f., Kelly's tactic of loose construing). This will prevent his/her level of anxiety rising still further. Second, the more anxious a person is, the more he/she will resist giving up a conceptual schema according to which percepts have been assimilated. To give up a schema would result in more unassimilated percepts and raise the anxiety level still higher. Third, anxious persons should tend to deny or avoid the perception of incongruent stimuli (c.f., Kelly's strategy of hostility). McReynolds noted that the person did not have to be aware of the incongruencies for this to happen.

McReynolds noted that normal and pathological anxiety are the same because both arise from unassimilated percepts. The only differences are those of degree and of coping strategies necessary. When unassimilated percepts are relatively easy to assimilate, we experience thrill but, when they are not, we experience anxiety.

Trauma leads to anxiety because it results in percepts that are not readily assimilated. Sometimes, new percepts destabilize earlier experiences (and schemata), resulting in a flood of now unassimilated percepts. Psychotherapy seeks to reverse these processes by helping the patient to assimilate previously unassimilated percepts and to reintegrate perceptual systems that were incongruent with other systems.

MILDRED MCCOY

McCoy (1977, 1981) has provided a thorough analysis of how emotions can be fitted into PCT in a way that is consistent with Kelly's approach. McCoy discussed Kelly's concepts of aggression and hostility, in addition to threat, fear, anxiety and guilt, because she saw them as antecedents and the consequences of emotions. This may be incorrect, confusing aggression and hostility as defined in common usage with the specific definitions provided by Kelly.

Most of us commonly define people as aggressive when their behavior hurts us. Kelly, as in his discussion of other concepts, tried to look at this behavior from the subject's point of view.

What is the aim of the aggressive person? Kelly defined aggression as the active elaboration by people of their perceptual field. Aggressive people seek out and get involved in situations that require decisions and actions. The contrast of aggressiveness is passivity. Thus, aggressive sexual people seek out sexual situations and get involved sexually with others. Aggressive business people seek out business opportunities and actively pursue them. Aggressive scholars conduct and publish a large amount of research. Other people may sometimes suffer as a result of the aggressive person's behavior. However, the goal is not to hurt others, but rather to get involved with and achieve in particular types of situations. It is not clear what emotions accompany such behavior.

Suppose that you test a part of your construction system and find that it does not predict well what happened to you and so is of little use to you. This part of your construction system is invalid. What can you do? You could try to replace this part with a more useful construction system that anticipates the outcome of the events more accurately. If you do this, you are building a better construction system.

Alternatively you could refuse to accept the disconfirming evidence that has invalidated your construction system and, instead, seek to distort the information so that it is no longer inconsistent with your construction system, or you could even seek to extort information from the environment that is consistent with your construction system. These strategies are the essence of Kelly's concept of hostility. Again, it is far from clear what emotions accompany hostile strategies.

McCoy sought to expand the set of emotions explained by PCT, endeavoring to include what other psychologists have described as the fundamental emotions (e.g., Tomkins, 1970; Izard, 1972; Ekman, Friesen & Ellsworth, 1972).

First, McCoy considered *changes in core structure*, with *threat* being an awareness of imminent comprehensive change in your core constructs and *fear* being an awareness of imminent incidental change in your core constructs. These are

identical to Kelly's definitions and have been discussed above.

McCoy continued by considering *changes in non-core constructs* (that is, peripheral constructs), with an awareness of imminent comprehensive change resulting in *bewilderment* and an awareness of imminent incidental change resulting in *doubt*. This is overly negative. An awareness of change in peripheral constructs could arouse *curiosity* or *interest*.

The third category of emotions results from *validation of core structures*. *Love* is experienced when your core structure is comprehensively validated, that is, "feeling accepted for the self you know you are" (p. 109). If the validation is only partial, that is, that only part of your core structure is validated, then *happiness* (or *joy, pleasure, delight* or *mirth*) is experienced.

The fourth category of emotions arises from *validation of non-core structures*, that is, peripheral constructs. Comprehensive validation results in *satisfaction* while partial validation results in *complacency*. The fifth category of emotions arises from *invalidation of core structures*, with *sadness* as the result. McCoy did not distinguish between total and partial validation here.

The sixth category was *fit of self and core role structure*. Following Kelly, McCoy defined *guilt* as an awareness of one's apparent dislodgment from your core role structure, whereas *self-confidence* is an awareness of a good fit between the self and one's core role structure. *Shame* results as an awareness of the dislodgment of the self from someone else's construing of your role. McCoy omits the critical term "core role" here, but it would probably make more sense to restrict shame to the core constructs and use *embarrassment* for dislodgment in the peripheral constructs.

The seventh category is *fit between one's own core structure and that of someone else*. Contempt and *disgust* result when you become aware that the core role of someone else is comprehensively different from one's own, and McCoy added that this may also involve the other person experiencing guilt. Clearly some factor is missing in McCoy's definition here. Individuals who are very different from oneself can be interesting and attractive as well as, in other cases, arousing

our disgust. Thus, disgust should involve a perception of a difference in core roles plus some additional factor.

The eighth category is *recognition of construct system functionality*. Here, McCoy followed Kelly in defining *anxiety* as an awareness that your construct system cannot explain or predict events in the situation in which you find yourself. When faced with a sudden requirement to construe, we experience *surprise*. When we are in situations which we can construe adequately, we experience *contentment*. Again, McCoy chooses one emotion when others might be equally likely, in this case *boredom*.

Finally, McCoy discussed aggression and hostility, and she saw *anger* as an awareness of invalidation of constructs leading to hostility. This was mentioned above, as well as objections to it. Cummins (2003) also found fault with McCoy's definition of anger on the grounds that McCoy linked anger too definitively with hostility. Cummins questioned whether anger *always* precedes hostility. Cummins proposed that anger was one of a range of possible responses to invalidation.

McCoy's analysis is of interest because of the framework she provided for the classification of emotions and the bipolarity of many of the categories. However, whether the definitions of the emotions that she provided are satisfactory or heuristic is open to question. For example, defining love as an emotion experienced when your core structure is validated (feeling accepted for the self you know you are) seems much too broad. For example, there may be times when this happens to a client in psychotherapy (the psychotherapist validates the client's core structure), but it is doubtful that all such clients "love" their psychotherapists in this situation. There are, of course, many types of love, but McCoy's definition seems inconsistent with many of these types.

Second, it does not seem as if McCoy's definitions of emotions result in an advancement of the theory, provide ways of better understanding clients, or provoke hypotheses for research. Kelly's definition of threat, for example, or hostility were provocative and did result in clinical

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insights and occasional research. For example, Lester (1968) reconceptualized manipulative attempts at suicide as hostile strategies which enhanced our understanding of the behavior. Third, as mentioned, McCoy often settles on one emotion in each situation rather than exploring the full range of emotions that could be stimulated by each situation.

Finally, some have objected that McCoy's analysis is not in the spirit of Kelly's approach. Walker and Winter (2007) noted that McCoy's analysis casts positive emotions as indications of validation of construing, while negative emotions are indications of invalidation of construing. This conceptualizes emotions as similar to positive and negative reinforcement, a link that Kelly rejected.

In the next section, the ideas of a theorist who was a precursor to PCT, Prescott Lecky, will be presented, and his ideas, although limited, are provocative.

PRESCOTT LECKY

Lecky (1949) was an early holistic theorist, proposing that humans are units, systems that operate as a whole. Lecky felt that such dynamic systems can have only one purpose, one source of motivation, and he proposed the need for unity or self-consistency as this universal dynamic principle.

Personality is an organization of values that are consistent with one another. The individual always tries to maintain his integrity and unity of the organization, even though we might judge his behavior to be irrational or disturbed. This organization defines his role, furnishes him with standards, and makes his behavior appear regular. Conflict is a result of environmental input conflicting with the system. The system then tries to eliminate this conflict.

Lecky saw individuals as having two tasks: (a) maintaining what he called "inner harmony" within their minds, that is, an internally consistent set of ideas and interpretations, and (b) maintaining harmony between their minds and the environment, that is, between their expe-

rience of the outside world and their interpretations of this experience. In his choice of a system principle that focused on consistency, Lecky foreshadowed Kelly's PCT.

For Lecky, learning was a process of assimilating new experiences. As the person assimilates these experiences and maintains his organization in a greater variety of situations, he maintains his independence and sense of freedom. Psychological development is a process of assimilating new information so as to maintain a self-consistent organization of values and attitudes. Whereas learning serves to resolve conflict, conflict must always precede learning. Conflict may profitably be viewed as a clash between two modes or ways of organizing. This anticipates Kelly's notion that healthy individuals are always trying to extend their construction system.

We need to feel that we live in a stable and intelligible environment. We need to be able to foresee and predict environmental events and, by anticipating them, prevent sudden adjustments. Anxiety is caused by breakdowns in our predictive system. To do this we may have to avoid certain situations or make overly simplistic judgments, but the goal is self-consistency. For some individuals, preservation of their predictive system without change becomes a goal in itself, and they seek experiences that confirm their predictions and avoid situations that disconfirm their predictions. This definition of anxiety is identical to that of Kelly, and the strategy described by Lecky is what Kelly called hostility.

Lecky brought emotions into his theory in a way consistent with Kelly's ideas but extending them.

Love

Lecky defined love as the reaction toward someone who has already been assimilated and who serves as a strong support to your idea of self. In this definition, Lecky added a component to the definition provided by McCoy. If we translate this into PCT, in order to love someone, we first have to be able to construe the individual. Then, the way in which they construe our core self has

to be consistent with the way in which we construe our core self. If this is the case, then they agree with our self-concept and, thereby, support it. "Love at first sight" does not fit into this definition of love (unless the person is a superb clinician and can construe another individual in a few brief moments).

Grief

Lecky defined grief as an emotion that is experienced when your personality must be reorganized due to the loss of one of its supports. This is a very narrow view of grief. If the President of the United States is assassinated, as in the case of John F. Kennedy, then the emotion that people experience is not this type of grief since the President did not support the way in which we construe ourselves. If our pet dies, then we may experience grief for it is possible that our pet did support the way in which we construe ourselves. For example, if we construe ourselves as a kind and caring individual, and if we showed this facet of ourselves with our pet, then losing the pet loses a support for our self-concept.

Hatred/rage and horror

Hatred and rage are emotions felt toward objects that we cannot assimilate, that is, events which we cannot construe. In this situation, we experience anxiety, and the anxiety cannot be reduced. In some of these situations, we may eventually be able to construe the objects, and then the hatred will diminish. Alternatively, we can avoid or destroy those objects so that we do not have to attempt to construe them (a hostile maneuver).

Horror is the emotion felt when we are confronted with experiences that we are not prepared to assimilate, such as a ghastly accident. In time, we may be able to assimilate this experience, and then the horror will diminish.

Pleasure

Experiences that increase consistency and unity give rise to joy and pleasure. Pleasure is experienced when we master new experiences, for example, when we learn to like nasty tasting foods, such as olives or bitter coffee. If we could learn to tolerate more bitter substances than coffee, other pleasures would replace our liking for coffee. The same is true for other sensory modalities. For example, as we mature, we come to like more and more complex music, art, and literature. The more difficult an accomplishment, the more pleasure we derive from it. Pleasure is clearly related to the basic desire for unity or self-consistency, and it can be understood only historically. Pleasure comes into existence because of a difficulty that is overcome, and continuous pleasure demands continuous solution of new problems. This definition of pleasure differs considerably from related emotions defined by McCoy such as happiness, joy, pleasure, delight, mirth and satisfaction.

Guilt

If your behavior violates your self-concept, you feel guilt. Clearly, this anticipates Kelly's definition of guilt. In PCT, this is when you have become dislodged from your core role.

Fear

Fear is experienced when we fail to resolve inconsistencies. This is very different from Kelly's definition of fear and seems to be equivalent to a low level of anxiety.

Emotions were seen by Lecky as characteristics of behavior when first encountering a new problem. They are, in fact, a way of assisting the acquisition of control over the experience and, when the experience is assimilated, the emotion will be reduced. Emotions do not disorganize behavior. The new experience disorganizes the behavior, or rather the personality, which in turn leads to greater stereotypy in the person's behavior.

COMMENT

Any comprehensive theory of personality cannot dismiss emotion and refuse to discuss or account for them. Although George Kelly claimed to have no emotion in his theory, he did discuss at least four basic emotions (threat, fear, guilt and anxiety). McCoy explored how other emotions could be incorporated into PCT and extended the range of emotions that could be accounted for. Lecky, writing eleven years before the publication of Kelly's two-volume work, anticipated some of the elements of PCT, albeit in a crude manner, and provided definitions of emotions such as pleasure, love and hatred, that are consistent with PCT and provocative. The result is that we can conclude that PCT is not a theory of personality in which emotions have no place. Rather, the full range of human emotion can be explained using the concepts of PCT.

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